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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 000045

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: NEW MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT OUTLINES AMBITIOUS
AGENDA, REQUESTS USG ASSISTANCE

REF: GUATEMALA 17

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Drew Blakeney for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Newly sworn-in Minister of Government Salvador Gandara, with whom the Embassy has long had a good relationship, outlined an ambitious agenda to the Ambassador January 9. He said he planned to increase the tempo and efficiency of police operations, including against major narcotics traffickers, while at the same time pushing forward much needed institutional reform. Many members of the rule of law institutions under his direction are corrupt or complicit in serious crimes, Gandara said. He committed to fully implementing the Organized Crime Law, including use of wire taps, undercover operations, and controlled drugs deliveries. He said he would need USG assistance to succeed in improving Guatemala's security environment. Participating Country Team members outlined ongoing and upcoming USG law enforcement assistance programs, and committed to help the new Minister. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 9, the Ambassador met with newly sworn-in Minister of Government Salvador Gandara (reftel). Also participating in the meeting were Jorge Paiz, an advisor to the Minister, and representatives of DEA, NAS, Pol/Econ, AID, and the FBI. Paiz, Gandara said, would serve as his liaison to the Embassy. Gandara deplored the current state of the National Civilian Police (PNC), saying he did not know which officers he could trust. He was deeply concerned by criminal penetration of the PNC, and asked whether the Embassy could sweep his office for microphones. Also deplorable was the government's lack of law enforcement intelligence. PNC officers were being sent out onto the streets without being told what to look for, or where. The relatively new General Directorate for Civilian Intelligence (DIGICI) needed to start producing actionable intelligence, and to do mapping of where the most serious crimes are being committed, so that additional resources could be targeted on those areas.

¶3. (C) Gandara said he would seek to expand the PNC, but would also rationalize the use of existing human resources. He had announced to the PNC during his introductory address that officers "caught running errands or with girls in the back of their trucks would go to the clink." Too many officers were performing secretarial, bodyguard, and other non-police functions, he said.

¶4. (C) Two jobs await him, Gandara said: One is to increase and improve law enforcement operations in the short-term, and the other is to reform the rule of law organs under his direction over the longer term. Regarding the second task, Gandara turned to the assembled Country Team members and

exclaimed, "Help!" The FBI representative described the Trans-national Anti-Gang initiative and the Central America Fingerprint Exploitation system (CAFE). He encouraged Gandara to continue to purge the PNC and to establish vetted units that would focus on the most serious kinds of crime, and work closely with designated prosecutors. The DEA representative discussed his agency's support for the UNILAT, an inter-agency law enforcement organ that focuses on narcotics-related cases, from money laundering to homicides, and serves as DEA's primary point of contact for extradition requests and search warrants. Hobbaling GOG counternarcotics operations, however, was the lack of implementation of the Organized Crime Law, which contains provisions for use of wiretaps, undercover agents, and controlled drug deliveries, the DEA Agent observed. The Ambassador stressed the need for the GOG to implement rapidly these elements of the Organized Crime Law and pointed out that CICIG -- which the USG supported -- needed these tools as well. (Gandara committed to pushing the President and President of Congress for passage of needed implementing legislation.) An AID officer described AID's crime prevention programs in Villa Nueva and AID's willingness to work with the GOG to replicate them, as well as a new AID program under the rubric of the Merida Initiative to strengthen municipal governments in areas threatened by narcotrafficking.

15. (C) Gandara said he wanted to immediately implement the Organized Crime Law as well as all USG assistance programs on offer. Specifically, he said he would replicate NAS' Model Police Precinct in Villa Nueva (which Gandara helped design when he was Mayor of Villa Nueva), as well as AID's crime prevention programs, including community-based policing and

youth-at-risk outreach centers. The Ambassador encouraged Gandara to work closely with Carlos Castresana, head of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), and to draw on CICIG's resources and expertise.

16. (C) President Colom had authorized him to arrest any political figure -- no matter how influential -- who was complicit in narcotrafficking, Gandara said, adding that he would do so. Gandara said he would go after Guatemala's major narcotics trafficking families, including the Lorenzanas and Mendozas. (Note: On January 13, the PNC executed a major though ultimately unsuccessful operation against the Mendozas. End Note.) Doing so would require the coordinated effort of all the state's rule of law organs. Encouraging inter-agency cooperation would be one of the hallmarks of his tenure, Gandara said. The Ambassador pledged USG support for his efforts. Gandara said he would seek regional cooperation with neighboring countries, but regretted that the Nicaraguan Government's response to his request for assistance on stolen cars had been negative. He lamented that Guatemala was losing control of its territory. Narcotraffickers operated hundreds of clandestine airstrips, co-opted local authorities, and Mexican Zetas (the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel) had taken control of some northern areas.

Mexican EZLN rebels in Chiapas controlled some informal border crossings, and ran smuggling operations, Gandara said. He stressed the need for action, and said that in terms of laws, sometimes it was better to ask forgiveness than permission. The Ambassador urged the Minister to work within the rules, and suggested that the Minister use the arrival of new Congress President Alejos to pass needed legislation.

17. (C) Pulling the Minister aside, the Ambassador offered to host a meeting for Gandara with the top members of the private sector, which Gandara readily accepted. The Ambassador also offered to host a meeting with Guatemalan human rights groups (which had criticized Gandara's appointment); Gandara agreed.

18. (C) Comment: Gandara exuded energy and enthusiasm during our first meeting with him as Minister of Government. He has a realistic appreciation of the appalling state of both the security environment and the country's rule of law institutions, and is turning to the USG for help. His

instinct is to be more operational, and to focus on police functions and presence. The Embassy will assist him with existing programs and resources as well as those coming on-line via the Merida Initiative. We anticipate a much greater degree of cooperation with Gandara than we had with his predecessor.

McFarland